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Rural Development seeks grant applications

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Spring is here, and as many Tennesseans are welcoming in the change of season, Rural Development is welcoming applications for several grant opportunities that foster economic growth for rural communities through housing, community and business programs.

Tennessee Rural Development has played a key role in the growth and success of the state's rural communities and has made a difference in the lives of rural families and community partnerships. As a team, RD is committed to the future of rural communities and to providing the latest information on available assistance.

Rural Development has announced more than \$31 million in federal assistance is available to rural communities in Tennessee and across the country for programs that promote energy initiatives, housing improvements and expanding broadband Internet access to rural communities.

Through Business Program, Rural Development announced \$22.8 million in federal funding now available for a competitive national energy grant program that can help Tennessee producers and small business owners fund energy projects on their operations.

Rural Development is now accepting grant applications to receive federal funding for both renewable energy and energy efficiency improvement projects. Renewable Energy Grants can range from \$2,500 to \$500,000, and Energy Efficiency Grants can range from \$2,500 to \$250,000, with requests not exceeding 25 percent of the eligible project cost.

Energy efficiency projects can include improvements to: pumping systems; heating and cooling systems; refrigeration; lighting; motor systems; insulation and retrofitting. Renewable energy projects can include systems deriving energy from biomass, biogas, wind, solar, hydrogen and geothermal. In addition to producers, businesses located in towns of less than 50,000 population are eligible for this cutting-edge program.

Since grant applicants will compete nationally, scoring criteria may include: amount of energy replaced or saved including environmental benefits; commercial availability of the proposed project and completeness of technical portion of the application; and written commitment of matching funds. If you have applied for this grant program and have not received funding in previous years you are also eligible

for additional points.

Tennesseans who qualify for this innovative program should contact their local Rural Development office to receive and submit their application before the postmark deadline of June 13.

Rural Development's Housing Program is also proud to announce the availability of more than \$117,000 in Housing Preservation Grant funds for Tennessee this fiscal year. This landmark program provides grants to nonprofit organizations and local governments to renovate existing low-income multifamily rental units. Funds may also be used to help individuals who qualify for repairs to low-income housing, either as homeowners, landlords, or members of a cooperative.

In fiscal years 2002 through 2004, Tennessee Rural Development funded more than \$700,600 in Housing Preservation Grants. The HPG program encourages applicants to leverage Rural Development dollars with other funding sources. Over the past three years,

award recipients have leveraged Rural Development funds with the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Home program, the Weatherization Assistance Program and nonprofit contributions to assist over 100 families across rural Tennessee with more than \$1.5 million in leveraged funds.

If you are a nonprofit organization or local government agency in rural a community with a population of 20,000 or less, you are eligible to apply. Applicants should contact Larry Kennedy in the state office at (615) 783-1375 for more information and to receive and submit an application before the May 13 deadline.

Rural Development's Community Facilities Program announced more than \$8.9 million is available in broadband grant funds nationwide through the Community Connect Broadband Grant Program which connects essential community facilities to high-speed telecommunications in rural

towns and communities where no broadband service exists.

Tennessee certainly appreciates this commitment to open the door to broadband infrastructure for rural communities. This investment can help connect essential services of police and fire protection, local government, hospitals, libraries and schools to broadband service in our rural communities while attracting more industry.

Incorporated organizations, state or local government agencies, cooperatives, private corporations, limited liability companies both for-profit and nonprofit that have authority to own and

operate broadband facilities are eligible to apply. Grant recipients will need to serve one community which does not currently have broadband transmission service, and whose population does not exceed 20,000.

Interested applicants should submit electronic grant applications at and follow the instructions found on the Web site. Completed paper applications should be submitted to the USDA Rural Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 2845, Stop 1550, Washington, DC 20250-1550.